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The Wisdom of the East Series

EDITED BY

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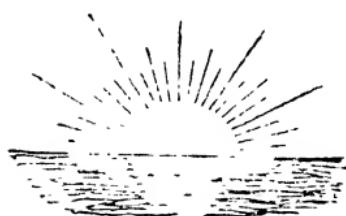
THE ROSE-GARDEN OF SA'DI

WISDOM OF THE EAST

THE ROSE-GARDEN
OF SA'DI

SELECTED AND RENDERED WITH
INTRODUCTION

BY L. CRANMER-BYNG



FOURTH IMPRESSION

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EDITORIAL NOTE

THE object of the editors of this series is a very definite one. They desire above all things that, in their humble way, these books shall be the ambassadors of good-will and understanding between East and West, the old world of Thought, and the new of Action. In this endeavour, and in their own sphere, they are but followers of the highest example in the land. They are confident that a deeper knowledge of the great ideals and lofty philosophy of Oriental thought may help to a revival of that true spirit of Charity which neither despises nor fears the nations of another creed and colour.

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THE
ROSE-GARDEN OF SA'DI

INTRODUCTION

ONCE a Dervish travelled out of Persia clad in the blue gown of his order, with many patches sewn thereon, carrying in his hand a pilgrim's staff—a little man and slight, with eyes overflowing with mirth and kindness, walking joyously from Ispahan into Syria. Many places have seen this ragged wanderer: Europe and Abyssinia, Egypt and Barbary, Armenia and Palestine, Arabia and India, all have been honoured in his passing. He has held many strangers and many assemblies spellbound with his words; he has preached as a mystic to materialists in the cathedral mosque at Damascus, and said of himself in truth:

I went a pilgrim through the universe,
And communed oft with strangers as I strayed;
In every corner some advantage found,
And from each sheaf of corn I drew a blade.

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This was Sa'di, whose full name may be written Maslah-ul-din Sa'di-al Shirazi, who is known throughout Persia and India to this day as Shaikh Sa'di, chief among the roving tribes of song.

He was born in Shiraz about 1193 A.D., and learnt whatever the Mohamedan world could teach him at the college of Bagdad, which was sacked and destroyed during his lifetime by Halaku Khan, grandson of the terrible Gengis Khan. Leaving college with light purse and lighter heart, he went on his travels, and, ever on the track of adventure, joined in the Holy War against the Christians. He had the misfortune to be captured, and was sent to work along with some Jews in the trenches at Tripoli. There he was recognised by one of the chiefs of Aleppo, who ransomed him for ten dinars and took him home and married him to his daughter, with whom he gave a dower of a hundred dinars. The lady had a tongue of eloquence, but not in the direction of poetry, and at length even the gentle Sa'di turned upon her. Once, when reproaching him, she said : "Art thou not the man whom my father ransomed from the captivity of the Franks for ten dinars ?" He answered : "Yes ! I am he who was redeemed for ten dinars and enslaved to thee for a hundred." The woman's influence cast a cloud upon him which not even the years of separation could

disperse. Of his other wife little is known except that she dwelt at Sanaa, the capital of Yamand, bore him an only son, who died young. The last sixty years of his long life were passed at Shiraz in a hermit's cell. He died 1291 A.D., most venerable, most beloved.

THE BOOK

TO-DAY, throughout Mohamedan and Parsi India and in Persia, three books are taught in the schools :

- (1) The Pand Nameh, or Book of Counsel.
- (2) The Gulistan, or Rose Garden.
- (3) The Bostan, or Garden of Perfume.

All three books were written by Sa'di, and are put into the hands of young scholars in the above order.

The Book of the Gulistan, or Rose Garden, as it is in English, was finished when Sa'di was over sixty years old. It is written in Persian, which language Sa'di only learnt when he was forty, with occasional verses and some sentences from the Koran in Arabic. It contains both prose and verse. Most often the prose tells the story and the verse points the moral; yet here and there the tale is in verse, and there are also many beautiful quatrains and couplets scattered throughout the book. The roses of Sa'di are

very real, not merely heads bound upon artificial stems, but roses girt with all their thorns about them.

Many sharp, witty, and just things abound, but the flowers of song are always uplifted above the thorns of admonition. Yet there is no poison either of thorn or snake in this rose-bower which the gentle soul of the old Shaikh pervades, where some subtle memory of the world's dead springs delays even the traveller of to-day, to whom Samarcand and Shiraz are only names. Here is nothing of the noise and pomp of later man. You feel that the dead gardener did but raise these roses of his heart for the nightingale of his soul by Allah's grace. Now-a-days we build our little villas of prose and rhyme, and stand at the open windows to be seen of those who pass. To Sa'di the work was greater than the man, and man was not the master of the garden.

SA'DI THE SUFI

Herein lies the test of all that will endure.

In the days of old men wrought for the glory of God. Now the artist has turned rationalist, and works for the glory of himself. It was the sublime conception of God that inspired the Sufis, Sa'di, Jami, and Jalaluddin. For the Sufis have held that love is ever the highest

and most inspiring theme of man ; that all beauty, all grace and charm that the lover sees in his beloved's face, is but a dim reflection of the wondrous vision behind the veil of mortal flesh ; that as two strive to become one, the man to be one with the woman and the woman one with the man, so the soul desires unity and seeks to find its lost attributes in the Godhead. To the Sufi, God is "The Beloved," "The Friend," all that I am not, all that I lack, all that I desire to be. He is also the Lover and we the beloved.

To God's beloved, even the dark hour
Shines as the morning glory after rain.

Mortal love was held to be but a recognition of the Divine in the mirror of the beloved. Giordano Bruno has embodied this idea in his "Heroic Enthusiasts" :

"The living object is the highest intelligible conception that he (the lover) has been able to form to himself of the Divinity."

Again :

"The Divinity is the final object, the ultimate and most perfect, but not in this state, where we cannot see God except as in a shadow or a mirror, and therefore He cannot be the object except in some similitude. . . . Now in such conceptions and similitudes the human intellect of this lower world nourishes itself till such time

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as it will be lawful to behold with purer eye the beauty of God."

And Jami has sung :

My world-endowing Beauty, to display
Its splendours, in a thousand mirrors shines.

Yet apart from the mirror of mortal loveliness is that God in little, that wandering fragment of Divinity—the soul. As the wife is part of the husband, so is the soul a part of God. Sa'di, preaching to the people of Damascus, quotes from the Koran the following verse : "*Verily we created man, and we know what his soul whispereth unto him, for we are nearer to him than the vein in his neck.*" And so at its appointed time complete unity with the Beloved is attained ; the atom is restored to the world dust, the planet is withdrawn into the solar system, and the soul is merged in God.

The lovers by the Loved One all are slain ;
No voice can answer from the dead again.

SA'DI THE POET

With this key to Sa'di's philosophy we may know the poet a little better than before. We see how swiftly those years in a hermit's lonely cell went by. The swan-song of the old poet-

philosopher of Japan, Kaibara Yekken, might well have been his own :

The past to me
A single night appears.
Ah ! the brief dream
Of more than eighty years !

He had known many side of life, and found good in all. He was intolerant only of intolerance. He had that keen sense of proportion and disproportion which we call humour, and this is the salt of all his work. His was that clear insight into the marrow of things which we call common sense. And when he is saddest, taking leave of youth and "the years light-hearted," he bids no hopes farewell. "How gladly when the flowers were in bloom I passed along the garden ways ! Return with the spring, O friend, and thou shalt see the flowers bloom o'er the dust of me." What hint of immortality is here in the triumph of beauty over decay and death ! How many springs have flown, and still the flowers are here !

Wisdom and beauty hand in hand, this is Sa'di. Nusherwan the Just, Nusherwan the Generous, is but a pale star to the moon of Sa'di's immortality ; and this may epitomise so much—a thought to bear with us from that rose-garden where the nightingale of the groves of Shiraz for ever sings :—take all that you can that is for

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lasting benefit from others and the world ; give unto others and the world all that you can in return.

He gave thee all who asks thee of thine own
To give and call to mind King Nusherwan.
The mean earth crumbles through that meaner man,
But Sa'di sings in every rose that's blown.

L. C. B.

NOTE.—This translation has been most carefully prepared with the help of my colleague, Mr. Kapadia, whose modesty alone will not allow his name to appear in conjunction with mine on the title-page. I have put all quotations from the Koran, and all quatrains written in Arabic, into italics, so as to distinguish them from the Persian.

PROLOGUE

WE HAVE NOT KNOWN THEE AS THOU
OUGHTEST TO BE KNOWN

VERSES

SHOULD any ask me on His form to dwell,
Helpless I say,—“ He hath no parallel.”
The lovers by the loved one all are slain,
No voice can answer from the dead again.

A holy man who had drawn over his head the cowl of meditation, and had been plunged into the ocean of reverie, was asked, when he returned from that state, by one of his friends seeking to cheer him : “ What rare thing hast thou brought us from the garden where thou hast been ? ” He replied : “ I fancied to myself and said, When I reach the rose-bower I will fill the skirts of my robe with roses as a present to my friends ; but the perfume of the flowers so intoxicated me that I let go the hold of my skirts.”

VERSES

O bird of the morning ! the love of the moth
 thou shalt learn,—
 The moth that desired, and was drawn to its
 agony mute.
 These charlatans seek for Him : vain is their
 thoughtless pursuit,
 Since he that hath knowledge is dumb and will
 never return.

VERSES

O Thou who towerest over random thought,
 O'er all that we have said, or heard, or taught,
 Life hath its term, the assembly is dispersed,
 And we have not described Thee from the first.

SWEET-SCENTED CLAY

I questioned once a ball of scented clay
 That came from the beloved's hand to mine :
 " Art thou of ambergris, or musk divine,
 Since thy sweet perfume draws my soul away ? "

" I, the mean clod, that by her beauty lay,
 Have drained the essence of the rose like wine ;
 Till my dull being thrilled to rapture fine,
 Or else I were but mud," I heard it say.

THE GIFT OF SPEECH

Now, while thou hast the wondrous power of word,
 Let every thought in shining grace appear ;
 To-morrow, when Death's messenger is here,
 He will constrain thee to depart unheard.

.

SA'DI MEDITATETH THE GULISTAN

DISTICH

Green was the gay apparel of the woods,
 Like festal robes on happy multitudes.

VERSES

In a twilight of Ardibehist Jellali *
 The bulbuls all were singing from the pulpits of
 the boughs,
 And the pearls of dew were on the petals falling,
 Like a sweetheart's shining tears when passions
 rouse.

I happened to be spending the night in a garden
 with one of my friends, in a lovely and refreshing
 place with heart-ravishing interwoven boughs :
 its walks seemed to be paved with little crystals,

* *Ardibehist*, the Zoroastrian month of February. *Jellali*, the
 Mohamedan calendar, inaugurated at Merv by the astronomer
 Omar Khayyám and six others, 1074 A.D.

whilst from its vines clusters like the Pleiades
were hung.

DISTICH

A garden whose waters were shackles of light :
A thicket whose minstrels enchanted the night.

VERSES

One with its bright-robed tulips all aflame,
One dark with fruits of many a curious name ;
The wind, amid the shadow of its bowers,
Had diapered the jewelled turf with flowers.

At dawn, when the thought of return had overcome the desire to linger, I saw that my friend had gathered in his skirts roses and sweet basil, and hyacinths and spikenards to bring with him to the city ; whereupon I spake : "Thou knowest that the flower of the garden will fade, and the seasons pass away, and the wise ones have said : 'Whatever is not lasting is not to be cherished.' " He asked : " What, then, is to be done ? " I replied : " For the delight of those who look, for the instruction of those who are present, I may write a book of a Rose-Garden [Gulistan] upon whose leaves no tyranny of autumnal blasts shall come, the blossom of whose spring the many shifts of time shall never tarnish with the year's slow fall."

MESNEVI *

What use are many flowers to thee, O man ?
Take thou one rose-leaf from my Gulistan.
A flower endureth for a little day,
But this Rose-Garden shall delight for aye.

* The Mesnevi consists of couplets, each line containing nine, ten or eleven syllables. The subject of the Mesnevi must be either Religion, Mysticism, Morality, Love, or War. For the convenience of the rhyme, I have not always kept to the couplet form.

CHAPTER I

THE MANNERS OF KINGS

FAITHLESSNESS OF THE WORLD

This was written over the portico of the Palace of
King Feridun.

THE world, O brother ! may with none abide.
Look to thy God, let Him suffice alone !
This world that cherished thee will cast aside :
A little while and all thy wealth is flown.
What matter when depart thou must,
If death should find thee in the dust,
Or call thee from thy throne !

A VISION OF SULTAN MAHMUD

One of the Kings of Khorasan in a dream beheld the vision of Sultan Mahmud, an hundred years after he had died. His whole body seemed to have crumbled and turned to dust, save only his eyes, which were moving in their sockets and looking about them. All the learned ones failed to interpret this, except a Dervish, who made

obeisance and said : " He is still looking to see how it came to pass that his kingdom belongs to others."

VERSES

Many are they, once famed, beneath the ground,
 That left no record of their little worth,
 And the old corse surrendered, earth to earth,
 Was so consumed that not a bone is found.
 The glories of King Nusherwan remain,
 And time remembers his munificence.
 Be generous, O friend ! ere passing hence,
 They shall proclaim thee with the moons that
 wane.

.

ON THE DECEPTION OF APPEARANCES

The man that never will declare his thought
 Conceals a soul of honour or of sin.
 Dost think yon silent jungle holdeth naught ?
 Perchance a lurking tiger sleeps therein.

.

FRIENDSHIP

He is no friend who in thine hour of pride
 Brags of his love and calls himself thy kin.
 He is a friend who hales his fellow in,
 And clangs the door upon the wolf outside.

.

RETIREMENT AND PEACE

A vezier, having been deprived of his post, joined the brotherhood of Dervishes. The blessing of their society was such upon him that he acquired content once more. The Sultan became well disposed towards him, and bade him resume his office; but he refused, saying: "It is better to be retired than busy."

VERSES

Those that have sought the hermit's cell where
quiet seasons rule
Have drawn the venom of the dog, the malice of
the fool;
They tore their controversies up, the pen away
they flung,
And so escaped the critic's lash, and foiled the
slanderer's tongue.

The king said: "Verily we are in need of one sufficiently intelligent who is able to carry on the affairs of the government." He answered: "It is a sign of sufficient intelligence not to meddle with such matters."

* * * * *

TOIL AND SERVITUDE

There were two brothers in Egypt, one of them in the service of the Sultan, the other living by

his own industry. The rich man once asked his poor brother why he did not serve the Sultan, in order to be released from the hardships of toil ? He answered : " Why dost thou not labour, in order to be free from the baseness of service, since wise men have said it is better to eat barley-bread and sit at ease than to be girt with a golden girdle and stand in service ? "

DISTICH

Better to leaven mortar with the hand
Than with crossed palms before the prince to stand.

VERSES

My precious life I spent considering
What I should eat in summer, wear in spring.
Vile belly ! take the crust ! 'tis nobler food
Than all the capons plucked in servitude.

* * * * *

ON REJOICING OVER A FALLEN FOE

A certain person told Nusherwan the Just that God Most High had taken from this world an enemy of his. He asked : " Hast thou heard by any means that He intendeth to spare me ? "

DISTICH

Exult not o'er the dying foe ! One day
 Thou too must quit thy tenement of clay.

• • • •

THE USE OF SPEECH

At the palace of Kisra * a council of ministers was being held. They asked Barzachumihr, who remained silent, why he joined not in the debate. He answered : "Veziers are like physicians, and prescribe only for the sick. Since I perceive the fitness of your opinions, I have nothing to say thereon."

MESNEVI

When business doth proceed without my aid,
 I care not to encourage or upbraid ;
 But should I see the blind before a pit,
 An I were dumb, I should be blamed for it.

• • • •

THIS WORLD THE FOOL'S

Harun-ar-Rashid said, when the kingdom of Egypt yielded unto him : "In answer to that rebel who through pride of the sovereignty of Egypt boasted that he was God, I shall bestow

* Kisra—another name for Nushervan.

this land upon the vilest of my slaves." He had a negro chattel, called Khosaib, a stupid fellow, whom he made governor of Egypt. So small was his intellect and understanding that when the farmers complained, saying : " We had sown cotton by the banks of Nile, and, lo ! the rains came out of season and ruined it," he answered : " Ye should have sown wool !" A holy man, hearing this, said :

MESNEVI

If livelihood by knowledge were endowed,
None would be poorer than the brainless crowd ;
Yet fortune on the fool bestows the prize,
And leaveth but themes for wonder to the wise.
The luck of wealth dependeth not on skill,
But only on the aid of Heaven's will :
So it has happened since the world began—
The witless ape outstrips the learned man ;
A poet dies of hunger, grief, and cold ;
A fool among the ruins findeth gold.

SPEAK NOT ILL OF THE GREAT AND DEAD

DISTICH

The wise will never call him great
Who of the great ones speaketh ill.

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VERSES

All these are nothing as they fleet away,
Throne and dominion, squalor and display.
If thou wouldst have no shadow on thy fame,
Soil not the temple of another's name.

CHAPTER II

THE MORALS OF DERVISHES

FAULT-FINDING AND SELF-CONCEIT

I REMEMBER being pious in my youth, given to night vigils, prayers, and abstinence. One night I was sitting with my father, *on whom God have mercy*, keeping awake and holding the precious Koran in my lap, whilst the company around us slept. I said : "Of these people not one lifts up the head or bows the knee (in prayer). They are all sound asleep, as though they were dead." He answered : "Little one of thy father, would that thou wert also asleep, rather than proclaiming the faults of others."

VERSES

The braggart sees himself alone,
Since he is veiled in self-conceit ;
Were God's all-seeing eye his own,
He would no weaker braggart meet.

THE SERMON FROM THE KORAN

Once I spake a few words of admonition in the cathedral mosque of Damascus to a congregation whose hearts were shrivelled and dead, not having left the highway of the world of form to pass into the world of meaning. I saw that my words were of no avail, and that sparks of fire cannot kindle green wood. I was grieved at teaching brutes and holding up a mirror to an assembly of the blind : yet I had opened the door of meaning and set myself to explain the verse : *We are nearer unto him than the vein of his neck.** When I said,

My love is nearer me than is myself,
Yet I am still estranged from her heart.
What can I do ? To whom shall it be said,
She bides with him, and he lies far apart ?

I had become intoxicated with the wine of this idea and the dregs of the cup (*i.e.* the sermon), yet rested in my hand when a traveller happened to be passing the outskirts of the assembly ; and the last circle (*i.e.* of the cup) had such effect upon him that he shouted aloud, and others joined him, while the raw portion of the multitude became disturbed. Wherefore I said, Praised be Allah ! Those that are far off, but perceive,

* Koran, chap. 50, v. 15.

are in His presence : those that are near, yet blind, are far away.

CALAMITY AND SIN

I saw a holy man upon the sea-shore who had been torn by a tiger. No drug could relieve his pain : greatly he endured, and yet was for ever giving thanks to God most high, saying : " Praised be Allah that I have fallen into ill-luck, and not into sin."

VERSES

If the beloved bids me die,
I shall not mourn the life I leave,
Nor ask my gentle tyrant why,
But only for my fault I'll grieve.

THE DERVISH CLOAK ADMITS NOT TO HEAVEN

A righteous man once saw in a dream a Sultan in Paradise and a holy one in hell. He asked himself, saying : " What is the reason of the exaltation of the one and the abasement of the other, seeing that the contrary should have been the case ? In his dream an answer came : This Sultan is in Paradise because of his love for the righteous, and that dervish in hell for seeking the favour of sultans.



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VERSES

What use thy rosary and patchwork dress ?
Restrain thy body from licentiousness.
Thou hast no need to wear the cowl of felt ;
Be thou true Dervish in a Tartar pelt.

* * * * *

FORBEARANCE

A band of vagabonds meeting a Dervish spoke evilly to him, beat him and ill-used him, whereupon he brought his complaint to his superior. The Director * replied : " My son ! the patched gown of the Dervishes is the garb of resignation, and he who, wearing it, cannot bear with injury, is but a pretender to whom our garb is forbidden."

DISTICH

Thou canst not stir the river's bed with stones :
Wisdom aggrieved is but a shallow brook.

VERSES

If any injure thee, thy spleen control,
Since by forgiveness thou shalt cleanse thy soul.
O brother, since the end of all is dust,
Be dust, ere unto dust return thou must.

* * * * *

* Persian, *Pir*, i.e. he who points out the way.

HUMILITY

Hark to my tale, how once a quarrel rose
 Betwixt a flag and curtain in Bagdad,--
 How, drooping from the march, the dusty flag
 Reproached the curtain : " Art not thou and I
 Both servants in the Sultan's court ? I know
 No respite from his service. From the light
 Of cock-crow to the gloom of nightingales
 I travel, travel : thou hast neither siege
 Nor battle to endure, nor whirling sand,
 Nor wind, nor heat to suffer ; while my step
 Is ever on the march. Why art thou held
 More honoured ? Thou art cherished by slim boys
 Of moon-pale beauty, jasmine-scented maids
 Touch thee caressingly ; while I am rolled
 By raw recruits, and oftentimes on the trail
 Carried head downwards."

Then the curtain spake :
 " My head is humbly on the threshold laid,
 Unlike thine own, that flaunting would defy
 The golden-armoured sun. Whoever rears
 The neck of exaltation shall descend
 Most speedily neck level with the dust."

THE DERVISH WAY

The way of dervishes is gratefulness, praise,
 worship, obedience, contentment, and charity,
 believing in the unity of God, faith, submission,

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and patience. Whoever hath these qualities is indeed a Dervish, though he may wear fine raiment ; whereas the idler, who neglecteth prayer, who goeth after ease and pleasure, turneth day into night in the bondage of desire, and night into day in the slumber of forgetfulness, eateth whatever he layeth hold on, and speaketh that which is uppermost, he is an evil-doer, though he may wear the garb of the Dervishes.

VERSES

Thou who within of good resolve art bare,
Yet dost the mantle of the righteous wear ;
Thou who hast but a reed-mat to thy floor,
Hang not the rainbow-curtain on the door.

FROM HIS GARDEN

I saw a golden bouquet of fresh roses
Shine o'er a cupola of new-mown hay.
I said, What is this mean grass that imposes ?
What beggar flaunts it in a king's array ?
Replied the lowly grass : " No vile pretender
To royal friendship soils the pride of kings ;
And I that have nor beauty, scent, nor splendour,
Am I not grass that from His garden springs ?

CHAPTER III

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF CONTENTMENT

WISDOM AND WORLDLY POWER

Two sons of princes lived in Egypt, the one given to the study of science, the other heaping up riches, till the former became the wise man of the age, and the latter the King of Egypt. Then the rich man looked with the eye of scorn upon the philosopher, and said : "I have reached the sovereign power whilst thou remainest poor as before." He replied : "O brother ! I must needs be grateful to the Most High Creator, that I have found the inheritance of the prophets, while thou hast obtained the inheritance of Pharaoh and Haman *—the Kingdom of Egypt."

MESNEVI

I am that ant which under foot is trod.
No wasp am I, for man to curse my sting.

* *I.e.* the inheritance of proverbial wickedness.

How can I rightly thank Almighty God
That I am harmless both to clown and king ?

ETHICS OF OLD CLOTHES

I have heard that a Dervish, burning in the flame of poverty, and sewing patch upon patch (upon his tattered robe), said, to the solace of his mind :

Give me a crust of bread, a tattered dress,
Since trouble's lighter than indebtedness.

Some one said unto him : " Wherefore sittest thou ? A certain one in this town is well disposed, kindly to all men, hath girded up his loins to serve the righteous, and hath seated himself by the door of every heart. If he but knew of thy case, he would deem himself obliged to comfort the mind of a deserving man." The Dervish answered : " Hush ! it were better to die of want than plead for our necessities before another."

Better in humble nook old clothes to mend
Than write for new ones to a wealthy friend.
To enter heav'n a neighbour's vassal seems
Worse than the red Gehenna * of our dreams.

* Gehenna (Arabic, *Jehennam*) is the first of the seven Moha-medan hells. It is designed exclusively for the faithful who have done wrong.

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF CONTENTMENT 39

FRUGALITY

It is written in the annals of Ardeshir Babekan * that he asked an Arabian physician how much food ought to be taken daily. He answered : "The weight of one hundred dirrheums were enough." The king asked him : "What strength will this quantity give me ?" He replied : "This quantity will carry thee ; but whatever more is taken, thou wilt be the carrier of it."

Eat to live, thy prayers repeating ;
Think not life was made for eating.

* * * * *

SELF-DEPENDENCE

They asked of Hâtim Tai if he had seen any one in the world of nobler sentiments than himself. He replied : "Yes, one day I slew forty camels to give a banquet to Arab chieftains. I went forth upon some affair to a corner of the desert, where I saw a gatherer of sticks, who had piled up a heap of brushwood. I asked him why he had not become a guest of Hâtim, seeing that many people had gathered around his carpet. But he replied :

' He that hath bread procured by honest sweat,
To Hâtim will not bear to be in debt.'

* The first King of the Sasanian dynasty. He reigned from A.D. 226—240.

Then I perceived that his sentiments were nobler than mine own."

PEARLS AND STARVATION

I saw an Arab sitting amid a circle of jewellers at Bosrah, and telling them tales. He said : "Once I lost my way in the desert, and had consumed all my provisions. I was prepared to die, when suddenly I beheld a bag of pearls. Never shall I forget the joy I felt, deeming them to be parched grain, nor the bitterness and despair with which I found them to be pearls."

VERSES

In deserts, amid shifting sand and drouth,
Nor pearl nor shell is manna to the mouth.
Ah ! what avails, when food and strength are
gone,
The girdle with its pearls or pebbles strown ?

ON PARVENUS

I met a fat fool tricked out in a rich robe, with a turban of Egyptian linen on his head, riding upon an Arab steed. Some one said : "O Sa'di ! what thinkest thou of this fine embroidery upon

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF CONTENTMENT 41

this ignorant beast ? ” I answered : “ It is like
vile characters scrawled with ink of gold.”

DISTICH

*Truly this thing with semblance of a man
Is but a calf, and bleateth like a calf.*

COUPLETS

This animal thou canst not call a man,
Save for the turban, cloak, and form we scan.
If all his goods it were thy lot to win,
Thou would’st find nothing lawful save his skin.
Though need and penury reduce the great,
They still have honour for their high estate ;
But though he bar with gold his silver door,
The Jew’s a Jew, and can be nothing more.

CHAPTER IV

THE BLESSING OF SILENCE

VIRTUE IN MALICE

I SAID to a friend that I had chosen to be silent rather than speak, since on most occasions good words and bad are mingled together, but the eyes of enemies only note what is bad. He replied : "That enemy does us greatest service who does not see any good."

POETRY

The brotherhood of malice draws not nigh,
Except to give an honest man the lie.

DISTICH

Virtue is ever vice to hatred's eyes,
Sa'di's a bramble to his enemies.

DISTICH

The world-illumining sun, the fount of light,
Looks ugly to the dull mole's dazzled sight.

ON THE CHOICE OF WORDS

Subhân Vâil is held to have had no peer in oratory, since he had spoken before an assembly for a whole year without using the same phrase twice ; but if the same meaning happened to occur, he expressed it in another way : and this is one of the accomplishments of courtiers and princes.

MESNEVI

A word, if binding on the heart and sweet,
Is worthy of belief and approbation.
What thou hast said ne'er let thy tongue repeat :
We do not twice partake the same collation.

ON INTERRUPTIONS

I once heard a philosopher say that no one has ever confessed his own ignorance, save him who begins to talk whilst another has not yet finished.

MESNEVI

Words have a head, O shrewd man, and a tail ;
Into no other's discourse fit thine own.
The man of sound discretion will not fail
To bide his time and hold the floor alone.

ON HEARING OURSELVES

A certain preacher was wont to think that his harsh voice gave pleasure, and often he shouted aloud and needlessly. Thou mightest have said that *the raven of separation* was the burden of his song ; and the verse, *for the most detestable of voices is surely the voice of asses*, appears to have fitted him. This distich is also concerning him :

*When Abu-l-Fares brays of Heaven's bliss,
He rocks the ruins of Persepolis.*

By reason of his rank the people of the place endured this defect, and did not think fit to distress him. Afterwards, however, another preacher of those parts arrived, who bore a secret grudge against him, and said : " I have dreamed about thee, and may it prove fortunate ! " " What hast thou dreamed ? " " I dreamed that thy voice had become melodious, and that the people had ease during thy sermons." For a little while the preacher pondered on these words ; then made answer : " Truly thou hast dreamed a blessed dream, since thou hast made me aware of my weakness. Now I know that my voice is harsh, and that the people are distressed with my loud reading ; accordingly I have vowed that henceforth I will not preach save with the tones of moderation."

COUPLETS

The baneful company of friends I fear,
 To whom my state perfection doth appear ;
 Each vice, to them, a flowering virtue grows,
 My thorns they call the jasmine and the rose.
 O for a bold opponent who would dare
 Of all my hidden faults to make me ware !

DISTICH

He whose faults are never told him,
 Thoughtless deems the angels mould him.

ON THE 'ADVANTAGES OF BEING A NUISANCE

In a mosque of the city of Sinjar a man was wont to chant the call to prayers in a voice that annoyed all who heard it. The owner of the mosque, a just Amir and well disposed, not wishing to give offence, said : "O generous man ! there are in this mosque some Muezzins of long experience, to whom I pay five dinars each monthly, but I will give thee ten if thou wilt go elsewhere." The fellow agreed and departed. After some time, however, he came back to the Amir and said : "Lord, thou hast done me wrong when for ten dinars thou didst send me hence, since, where I went afterwards, they offered me twenty

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dinars to go to another place, but I would not." The Amir said, with a smile : "Accept them by no means, since they will give thee even fifty for thy going."

DISTICH

None with an axe can mud from gravel part,
As thy discordant blather rakes the heart.

• • • •

FOR GOD'S SAKE

A fellow with a rasping voice happened to be reading the Koran, when a holy man passing by asked him what he received a month for so doing. He answered : "Nothing." Then added the holy one : "Why takest thou this trouble ?" He replied : "I am reading for God's sake." Answered the holy man : "Then for God's sake do not read."

DISTICH

If thus thou readest the Koran,* 'tis plain
No splendour in religion will remain.

* Koran, pronounced Qurán.

CHAPTER V

ON LOVE AND YOUTH

LOVE'S LAST RESOURCE

SINCE nought avails, let me arise and leave,
Though down the way of swords I wounded crawl ;
Perchance I shall attain to touch her sleeve,
And surely on her threshold dying fall.

• • • • •

THE BROOK OF LOVE

I had a companion with whom I had travelled for years and eaten salt. There was a boundless intimacy between us, till at length, for the sake of some petty gain, she allowed me to be grieved, and our friendship came to an end. Yet, notwithstanding, there still lingered some shadow of mutual desire, for I heard her once reciting the following two distiches of my own :

When my sweetheart, my mistress, approaches
me smiling, beguiling,
She sprinkles more salt on the wound that is
smarting and raw ;

Yet how would it be if my fingers were thrilled
by her tresses
Like the sleeve of the bountiful 'stroking the
Dervish's claw ?

Some friends bore witness not so much to the sentiment of these verses as to the beauty of my conduct ; and among them my former friend also praised me, regretting the loss of our past companionship, and confessing her fault, so that her love became clear to all. So I sent the following verses and made my peace :

Was there not a covenant between us ?
Thou hast proved most cruel, and not loving.
Once I lost the world for thee, belovèd,
Never dreaming we should drift asunder :
If thou so desirest love's renewal,
Turn, return ! be mine—mine more than ever.

• • • •

THE ASSUAGER OF THIRST

In the days of my youth I remember passing down a street, desiring to catch a glimpse of some moon-faced charmer. 'Twas in July, whose heat dried up the moisture in the mouth, whose simoon melted the marrow of the bones. In my human weakness, being unable to withstand the burning sun, I took shelter under the shadow of a wall, desiring that some one might relieve me from the

summer heat and quench the fire of my thirst with water. And behold ! suddenly from the darkness of some portico a light shone forth, a beauty whose grace the tongue of eloquence can never name.

She came like the fountain of rainbow dawn
 From the obscure heart of night :
 Like the water of immortality
 From cavern gloom to light.

In her hand she carried a bowl of snow-cooled water, within which was melted sugar and the essence of roses mixed. I know not whether she had perfumed it with Attar of roses, or whether the blossoms of her rosy face had been dipped therein. In short, I received the draught from her beautiful hands, and, having drunk it, began to live once more.

POETRY

*This thirst that parches me I cannot ease
 With limpid water, though I drank the seas.*

TO THE CUPBEARER

Blessed is he whose eyes, by Allah's grace,
 Light with the dawn upon thy lovely face.
 One drunk of wine awakes in twilight grey,
 One of the bearer dreams till Judgment Day.

LAILI AND MEJNUN

A certain King of the Arabs was told the story of Laili and Mejnun, and of the latter's madness ; how that, notwithstanding his learning and eloquence, he had turned to a life in the desert and let slip the reins of self-control. The King commanded that they should bring him into his presence, and when this was done, he began to rebuke him, asking him what flaw he had seen in the nobility of human nature that he should take upon him the manners of beasts and forsake the society of his fellows ?

Mejnun answered :

The many friends that oft my passion banned,
Could they behold her face, might understand.

COUPLETS

Would that they that do reprove me
Saw the beauty that doth move me !
O ravisher of hearts ! the knives that strip
The lemon-peel would on their fingers slip.*

Then indeed the truth might bear witness to the saying : *This is he for whose sake ye blamed me.*† The King desired to see for himself the beauty of Laili, the cause of so much misery,

* Meaning that they would cut their fingers, neglecting the banquet to gaze upon her beauty. Cf the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Koran xii. v. 31.

† Koran xii. v. 32.

and ordered search to be made for her. Having sought through many Arab tribes, they found her and brought her to the King, into the courtyard of the Palace. For a time he looked upon her form, and she appeared contemptible in his eyes, since the meanest of the slaves in his Harem surpassed her in beauty and charm. Mejnun, who in his wisdom understood (the King's mind), said : "It would behove thee to look from the window of Mejnun's eye on the beauty of Laili, that the miracle of her appearance might be made known to thee."

POETRY

*If the green leaves had but listened
To the glade's romance I heard,
Perchance to my tears they had glistened
And sighed when my own songs stirred.
Say unto him, O friends, whose heart is whole.
"Would thou mightest know the anguish of my
soul!"*

• • • • •

ALAS !

She, who could neither rest nor sleep
Ere round her she had scattered hyacinths and
roses,
Now with the roses of her face death-strewn
reposes,
And o'er her tomb wild brambles creep.

CHAPTER VI

ON WEAKNESS AND WISE OLD AGE

THE ANGUISH OF DEPARTURE

I WAS in controversy with some learned men in the cathedral mosque of Damascus, when suddenly a youth entered amongst us, asking whether any one spoke Persian. Most of them pointed to me, whereat I questioned him concerning the matter. He said that an aged man, one hundred and fifty years old, was in the agonies of death, but went on speaking something in Persian which no one might understand. If I would but go, I might be able to find out if haply he desired to make his will. When I came to his pillow he said :

Awhile I called on Rest to come and stay.
Alas ! the soul is weary of delay.
We were but seated at the festival
Of many covers when One cried : " Away ! "

I rendered these words into Arabic for the Damascenes, and they were amazed that, having regard to his long life, he should so regret the

ending of it. I asked him : " How do you now feel ? " He replied : " What shall I say ? "

VERSES

Hast thou not seen what torture must be borne
By him whose teeth are from their sockets drawn ?
Consider what his anguish in that hour
When his dear life is from the body torn.

• • • •

ON PROGRESSION

Once in the pride of youth I had walked far,
and in the evening I reached the foot of a slope
tired out. A frail old man, who likewise had
followed the caravan, came and asked me : " How
is it that thou liest here ? This is no place for
sleep." I answered : " How am I to go on,
having lost the use of my feet ? " He said :
" Hast thou not heard that it is better to go
slowly and halt a little, than to rush ahead and
become exhausted ? "

COUPLETS

O thou who wouldst attain the gaol,
A greybeard bids thee curb thy soul.
Yon Arab but a course can stay :
The camel saunters night and day.

• • • •

THE NON-RETURNING YEARS

An active, graceful, laughing, sweet-tongued youth was once in the circle of our society. No manner of grief had pierced his heart, and his lips had never ceased from smiling. An age had passed, and we chanced to meet again, and I found that he had taken a wife and begotten children ; yet I saw that the root of enjoyment had been torn up and the roses of his face had faded. I asked him how he was and what he did ? He answered : " Since I became a father I left off playing the child."

POETRY

Where is youth when locks are falling,
And the changeful years are calling ?

DISTICH

Man of scanty hairs and grey,
Youth alone is time for play.

MESNEVI

Seek not a youth's bright mettle from the old :
The unreturning years must ever on.
When autumn rustles through his swathes of gold,
Those gay green pennons of the spring are gone.

COUPLETS

The season of youth has departed,
 Alas for the years light-hearted.
 Time the lion's claws doth pare,
 And we with the lynx on whey must fare.

POETRY

A beldame stained her hoary tresses black :
 " O little mother of old times," I said.
 " Most cunningly thou hast adorned thy head.
 Yet never canst thou stretch the crooked back.

• • • • •

IN THE FOLLY OF YOUTH

Once in the folly of youth I shouted at my mother. Sorrowing she sat down in a corner and wept, saying : " Hast thou forgotten the days of thy childhood, that thou art harsh towards me ? "

COUPLETS

How sweetly said the old dame to her son,
 By whom she saw the tiger overthrown :
 " Couldst thou recall the soon-forgotten years
 When once I held thee helpless and in tears,
 Wouldst thou to-day thy savage fury fling,
 Thou lion-like hero, at this poor old thing ? "

* On Persian homesteads the whey and skimmed milk is often poured out upon the ground, only to be lapped up at nightfall by prowling leopard and wild cat.

CHAPTER VII

THE EFFECTS OF EDUCATION

KNOWLEDGE IS WEALTH

A PHILOSOPHER was teaching boys, and said to them : "O darlings of your fathers, learn a trade, since no reliance may be placed upon the possessions and riches of the world : for silver and gold are a source of peril, since either a thief may steal them at once or the owner waste them by degrees ; but a profession is a living spring and wealth enduring. Although a professional man may lose his fortune, he need not grieve, for his knowledge is wealth of itself, and wherever he go he will be honoured, and sit in the upper seat : but he who has no calling will glean the crumbs and suffer want."

DISTICH

He finds not easy to obey whose word was man's
behest,
Nor will he bear with insolence whom all men have
caressed.

VERSES

Once confusion filled Damascus,
 Each one left his quiet corner ;
 Learned sons of lusty peasants
 Were the veziers of the Caliphs :
 While the silly sons of veziers
 Begged their bread through every village.

VERSES

Dost want thy sire's inheritance ?
 Acquire his business ways,
 Since all the gold that feeds thy glance
 May melt within ten days.

.

CONCERNING MAINTENANCE

I heard a teacher say to his disciple : The mind of man is so much given to thoughts about maintenance that his place in Paradise would surpass that of the angels, were he to be as solicitous about the Giver of maintenance.

COUPLETS

Allah did not forget thee in that term
 When thou wast but the buried, senseless germ :
 He gave thee soul, perception, intellect,
 Beauty and speech and reason circumspect :

By Him five fingers to thy fist were strung,
 And thy two arms upon thy shoulders hung.
 O graceless one ! what cause hast thou to dread
 Lest He remember not thy daily bread ?

• • • •

THE LILIES OF IMMORTALITY

A certain illustrious man had a worthy son who died. When they asked him what he desired should be written upon the urn of the tomb, he answered : "The verses of the Holy Book * are deserving of more reverence than to be written in such a place, where they might be effaced by time, or trodden upon by men, or defiled by dogs. If it is needful to write anything, let this suffice :

How gladly when the lilies bloomed,
 My heart the loaded ways did roam !
 Pass with the spring, O friend, and, lo !
 The lilies breaking through my loam."

* The Koran.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE CONDUCT OF LIFE

MAXIMS OF LIFE

PROPERTY is intended for the comfort of life, not life for the piling up of wealth. A philosopher on being asked who is the lucky man and who the unlucky, replied: "He is lucky who has sowed and enjoyed (the harvest thereof); he is unlucky who has died and left behind."

DISTICH

Pray not for him, the good-for-nothing screef,
Who piled his useless riches out of view.

A learned man who is intemperate is like a blind torch-bearer: *He lights the road for others, but does not see himself.*

He who has spent an aimless life
Gained nought and threw his gold away.

Three things cannot endure without three other things : Property without trade, science without controversy, or a country without government.

Reveal not every secret thou hast to a friend, for how knowest thou that he may not hereafter become thine enemy ? Do not unto thine enemy all the evil that is in thy power, since one day he may become thy friend.

Show no mercy to a foe in his weakness, since when he is strong he will show thee none.

DISTICH

Curl not the beard of scorn at foes whose weakness thou dost scan.

In every bone the marrow's found, in every coat the man.

If thou knowest of news which will cause pain, be silent and let others disclose it.

Nightingale ! bring word of spring,
Leave bad news to the owl.

A Mussalman disputing with a Jew,
I shook with laughter as the quarrel grew ;
The Moslem shouted : " If this deed of mine
Be false, God strike me for a Hebrew swine ! "

Bellowed the Jew : " If I have sworn a lie,
By Pentateuch a Mussalman I'll die."
So, from earth's face should wisdom disappear,
None will admit their ignorance, I fear.

• • • • •
Obedience cometh not from a body without heart, neither is there profit in a husk without a kernel.

• • • • •
Not every one who is keen to argue is shrewd in business.

• • • • •
Many a gracious form by veil concealed,
The mother of one's mother stands revealed.

• • • • •
Not every man who is of handsome form is of good character : virtue is within the man, and not upon his skin.

• • • • •
Even though the gem fall into the mire, it retains its preciousness, and the dust, although it be whirled up into the sky, will yet remain base dust.*

• • • • •
* The first part of this maxim has an almost exact counterpart among the Chinese. One of their best-known proverbs says, " Though the white gem be cast into the mire, it cannot be lastingly sullied."

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Musk is known by its perfume, and not by the druggist's label. The wise man is like a vase in an apothecary's shop, silent but full of virtues, whilst the ignorant man is loud of voice, like the warrior's drum.

Two things are contrary to reason : To enjoy more than Providence allows, and to die before the time appointed.

Fate will not alter for a thousand sighs,
Nor prayers importunate, nor hopeless cries.
The guardian of the store-house of the wind
Cares nothing if the widow's lantern dies.

ADMONITION

O thou seeker of food, sit, for thou shalt eat !
O thou desired of death, run not, for thou
canst not save thy life !

COUPLETS

To God's beloved even the dark hour
Shines as the morning glory after rain.
Except by Allah's grace thou hast no power,
Nor strength of arm such rapture to attain.

QUATRAIN

To whom shall I revile thee ? None beside
 Is Judge, nor any wisdom doth display.
 Whom thou dost guide, his feet shall never stray
 Whom thou disownest, none may ever guide.

• • • •

CONCLUSION OF THE BOOK

The Book of the Gulistan has been finished,
 and the aid of Allah besought. By the favour
 of the Almighty-- may His name be hallowed ! -
 throughout the work the custom of writers to
 insert verses borrowed from the ancient poets
 has not been followed.

DISTICH

To deck oneself in tatters of one's own
 Is better than a broidered robe to loan.

Most of the sayings of Sa'di, being enlivening
 and mingled with gaiety, for this reason short-
 sighted critics have lengthened the tongue of
 censure, saying that it is not the duty of the
 intelligent to waste the marrow of their brain, or
 consume without profit the smoke of the lamp.
 It is, however, not to be concealed from enlight-
 ened men, who can perceive the meaning of words,
 that pearls of wholesome warning are threaded
 upon the string of perfect continuity, and the

bitter tonic of advice is sweetened with the honey of wit, lest the mind of the reader should be wearied and debarred from benefiting thereby :

And praise be unto the Lord of both worlds!

MESNEVI

We gave good counsel in its proper place,
And spent a lifetime in the work of grace.
Yet if the prophet touch no willing ear,
Suffice it that he spake the message clear.

PRAYER FOR ALLAH

*O thou that lightest on the Gulistan,
Implore God's mercy upon him that wrote,
And him that readeth it. Ask for thyself
Whatever is most needful, for the scribe
His bounty. If on that tremendous dawn
Of Resurrection, blessed be my lot
Before the All-Compassionate to stand,
I will but murmur : Lord, the sinner, I—
And Thou the Master of beneficence—
For all my evil deeds Thy pardon, Lord ! ”*

DISTICH

By Allah's grace the end befell
Before we looked on Azrael.*

* The Angel of Death.

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